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ABSTRACT

More than half of runaway adolescents cite poor family communication and conflict as the primary reasons for running. Runaways (.5-1.5 million annually) generally arrive on the streets with few survival skills and little money. They are often subject to abuse of various sorts, and many eventually resort to criminal activity or use drugs in efforts to cope. This paper describes some problems that runaways face at home and on the streets, and the public and private sector responses to their needs. Sweeping changes in legislation have set the tone for changes in the juvenile court system and in programs and services for these youth. Innovative approaches to helping runaways, those at risk, and their families are in place at both the community and federal levels. The National Runaway Switchboard is a major point of contact for reuniting families and runaways. Partnerships of volunteers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and state and federal agencies have created networks to help runaways and at-risk youths. This paper reviews the limited research on the effects of these changes in bringing runaways home, on educational and vocational outcomes, the incidence of drug and alcohol abuse, and the development of constructive relationships. A glossary of terms is provided. (Contains 56 references.) (EMK)

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RUNAWAYS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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RUNAWAYS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

According to the National Network of Runaway and Youth Services, approximately .5 to 1.5 million youths run away from home annually. Most are between ages 14 and 17 years. More than half of the runaways surveyed cite poor family communication and conflict as the primary reasons for running. Nearly 25% report a history of physical abuse with estimates of sexual abuse ranging from 15%-40%. Other factors associated with running include: drug use, poor school performance, truancy, and difficulty with peer groups. About 60% of runaways are female.

Runaways generally arrive on the streets with little or no money and few survival skills. Many use drugs to help cope with a chaotic, sometimes traumatic, past or with life on the streets. Approximately 40% of runaways were physically assaulted, 40% of females and 10% of males were sexually assaulted, and 20% of females and 40% of males were assaulted with weapons after leaving home.

Unable to find and keep legitimate employment, many runaways eventually succumb to involvement in some type of criminal activity such as shoplifting, credit card fraud, prostitution, or robbery. This segment of the population frequently reports medical or psychiatric problems, often linked to high-risk behaviors, such as drug use and prostitution. An estimated 5,000 runaway and homeless youths die each year from violence, suicide, or illness.

LEGISLATION AIMED AT RUNAWAYS

The landmark Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) of 1974 set the tone for handling runaways through juvenile courts nationwide. The JJDPA classified running as a status offense because the person committing the offense is a minor. In contrast, delinquent offenses are more serious and would be subject to criminal prosecution if committed by adults. The core mandate of the JJDPA is the deinstitutionalization of status offenders (DSO) which supported innovative prevention programs and community-based alternatives to juvenile incarceration and established formula grants to states and local public and private agencies.

Responses to the JJDPA have been varied between and within states. Some states raised the issue of whether they had the authority to carry out the DSO mandate, whether a community-based service network was sufficiently in place, and whether funding levels would be adequate to support social service programs. Guidelines set forth by the JJDPA also affected police responses to runaways because the DSO mandate restricted some police options, such as incarceration, in handling status offenders in general and runaways in particular.

The juvenile court system nationwide witnessed changes as a result of the JJDPA and its amendments. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) notes that only a small fraction of juveniles come to the attention of the courts for running away because many reports regarding runaways are made to agencies outside of the juvenile court system and these agencies typically divert juveniles from the courts.

OJJDP's Juvenile Court Statistics 1995 showed that of the 146,400 status offense cases handled by juvenile courts in 1995, approximately 23,900 (16%) involved runaways. This represents a 54% increase in the number of runaway cases compared to 1991. Runaways were detained between court intake and case disposition in greater proportions than were juveniles in any other status offense category. Of the estimated 9,900 status offense cases involving detention, approximately one-third involved runaways. Runaways were granted out-of-home placement more frequently than were juveniles in nearly all other offense categories. Approximately one-quarter of cases formally handled by the juvenile court system were granted out-of-home placements in foster care, group residences, or residential treatment facilities; approximately 13% were granted formal probation by the court. Neither gender nor race were significantly associated with juvenile court case disposition among runaways.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR RUNAWAYS

With a 1995 budget of nearly \$70 million, the federal government provided funding for a network of runaway services across the country through three primary programs: the Basic Center Program, the Transitional Living Program, and the Drug Abuse Prevention Program for Runaway and Homeless Youth. Together these programs reduce family conflict and prevent running behavior, meet the immediate needs of youths who have run away from home, and help those youths who cannot return home to learn the skills necessary to transit to adulthood and to lead more productive lives.

One main point of contact between runaways and services is the National Runaway Switchboard. In 1996, the Switchboard received approximately 160,000 calls for assistance in reunifying runaways with their families or for information and referrals. Other programs also help runaways return home. For example, the KIDS CALL Program offers to arrange free transportation for runaways returning to their families. Greyhound Bus Lines, in cooperation with the Travelers' Aid Society, provides runaways a free bus ride home from over 2,500 locations nationwide. The business community has mobilized to help youths asking for help to get to appropriate youth shelters or emergency assistance sites. Health service networks specifically targeted to the needs of runaways are in place in several cities across the country, with some services provided at mobile health vans.

Innovative programs and partnerships have emerged, such as the Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Inc. program for runaways in Boston. In 1996, this program provided counseling, educational, vocational training, and medical and dental services to an estimated 4,000 runaway and at-risk youths. The Bridge program also collaborated with other agencies to provide services for runaways with developmental disabilities. Widened referral networks and more targeted programs should continue to increase access to services.

OUTCOME STUDIES

Identifying the success of runaway services has been a difficult and evolving task. Our search for studies or program outcome or evaluation reports revealed that little or no follow-up data were available on the vast majority of youths who received services. The few available reports were generally positive, though design limitations reduced the generalizability of these reports. To help gather information on various programs and services designed to assist runaways, the National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth (NCFY) serves as an information center, tracks and documents program activities, provides technical training and assistance, and requires detailed data reporting on the impact of various services on the daily lives of runaways. These efforts can help to identify the most productive programs, identify areas of greatest need, and coordinate resources.

DISCUSSION

How a society responds to its most troubled youths reflects both the hopes of that society and its priorities. Public concern with the problems of runaways, before youths leave home, while they are on the streets, and afterward, has fostered many well-targeted social services and court-administration programs to aid these youths and their families. In addition to services for youths who leave home for the streets, prevention and long-term follow-up services are available in many cities. Organized, cooperative efforts between communities and local, state, and federal agencies have broadened the network of services available and have fostered inclusion of disabled and other at-risk youths.

Few rigorous studies demonstrate the impact of various services and programs on the lives of runaways and their families. Longitudinal studies of runaways can help to answer questions such as:

How many runaways returned home and what changes were made in the home?

How did interventions affect educational and vocational outcomes?

Did interventions reduce the incidence of drug and alcohol abuse?

Outcome research on runaways can provide essential information to match specific programs with subgroups of this population as well as to identify gaps in needed services. This research can also guide policy decisions regarding funding of programs with identified benefits, as well as develop and evaluate innovations.

RUNAWAYS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

Some teens see running away from home as a rite of passage. For others, it is a last resort escape from neglectful or abusive homes. For some parents, a runaway teen triggers a flood of desperate phone calls to friends, relatives, the police and anyone who may have seen their child. Other parents barely seem to notice their child's absence, or even actively force their teen or near-teen child to leave.

Innovative approaches to helping runaways, those at risk of running, and their families are in place at both the community and federal levels. Unique partnerships of volunteers, non-profit organizations, the business community, and state and federal agencies have created networks to help runaways and at-risk youths. Prevention programs resolve family conflicts and other problems associated with running before a crisis develops and a child leaves home. For youths who do run away, intervention programs provide emergency shelter, counseling and, whenever possible, reunify families. Intervention programs also divert these youths away from the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Local juvenile courts, while still enjoying wide latitude, have federal guidance on the disposition of runaways. These courts typically redirect runaways from incarceration or placement in state institutions to out-of-home placements and social service agencies to help them successfully transit to adulthood.

This paper describes some problems that runaways face at home and on the streets and the public and private sector responses to their needs. It also describes how these responses have shifted over time. The paper reviews the relatively limited research on the effects of these changes in bringing runaways home, on educational and vocational outcomes, the incidence of drug and alcohol abuse, and the development of constructive relationships. The authors provide a glossary of terms.

Glossary

Adjudicated	A petition that is formally ruled on by the court.
Basic Center Program	Basic Centers provide outreach, emergency shelter, temporary housing, meals, clothing, counseling, assess needs of runaways, identify aftercare services, provide referrals, attempt to contact parents or guardians and, wherever possible, reunite families. These federally-funded centers network with law enforcement agencies, schools, and other community agencies.
Basic needs	Food, shelter, clothing, medical care and other necessities.
Broad Scope Runaways	Youths who have left home voluntarily, without the permission of a parent or guardian, and who have stayed away overnight. This term is used to distinguish those who left home on their own from those who were forced out or pushed out of their homes.
CHINS	Youth who have committed a status offense rather than a juvenile offense (see below). In some states these youths are called "children in need of supervision" (CHINS), "juveniles in need of service supervision" (JINS), or "persons in need of service or supervision" (PINS).

Delinquent offense

Delinquent offenses are those acts committed by juveniles which, if committed by adults, would be criminal offenses. Delinquent acts are viewed by the legal system as more serious than are status offenses and include crimes against persons or property, drug offenses, and crimes against public order, such as weapons violations, nonviolent sex offenses, and disorderly conduct.

DSO Mandate

A key provision of the JJDPA, the deinstitutionalization of status offenders (DSO) mandate, requires that a youth who has committed a status offense cannot be held by the court in a jail, state school or other institution. Instead, that youth must be handled through social services.

FYSB

The Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services administers grants for the Basic Centers, Transitional Living and Drug Abuse Prevention Programs for Runaway and Homeless Youth which support community-based public and private agencies.

JJDPA

The landmark Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) of 1974 provided for very limited placement of status offenders in secure lockups for detention and correction, promoted separation of status and criminal offenders through the courts and in disposition options, and diverted status offenders from formal juvenile justice proceedings.

**National Runaway
Switchboard**

The National Runaway Switchboard is a federally-funded program that runaways can call for information, assistance and local program referral. The Switchboard will place a no-cost phone call to parents or caretakers for youths who want to call home. The Switchboard is linked to a computerized directory of more than 10,000 service agencies and non-computerized resource directories of more than 120,000 organizations throughout the United States. The Switchboard also provides confidential information, referral, and counseling.

NISMART

The National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Throwaway Children (NISMART) conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice is one of the largest sources of data on runaways and other endangered or at-risk youth.

Nonpetitioned case

A status offense case that is handled informally.

OJJDP	The JJDPA provided for the creation of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) within the Department of Justice, to coordinate juvenile justice programs. The Department of Health, Education and Welfare was authorized to administer Title III of the JJDPA, the Runaway Youth Act, which provided grant money to support runaway shelters and coordinated networks of youth shelters and outreach services.
Petitioned case	A case in which the parents or guardians of a youth ask a court to make a decision regarding a youth who has committed a status offense.
Runaway	A person under the age of majority (18 years in most states) who leaves his or her legal residence for at least one night without the permission of parents or legal guardians.
Status Offense	A status offense is an act which is considered a violation of the law only when the person who commits that act is a juvenile. Status offenses include running away, school truancy, incorrigibility or ungovernability, curfew violations, possession, purchase, or consumption of alcohol, or tobacco violations.

- Throwaway** A youth who has been forced to leave home, not allowed back, abandoned, or whose parents or guardians made no efforts to retrieve the youth . The NISMART study estimates 127,100 "throwaways" in the United States annually.
- Transitional Living Program** The Transitional Living Program (TLP) helps youths aged 16-21 years to develop skills for independent living and prevents dependency on social services. The Program operates through host family homes, group homes, and supervised apartments that may be agency-owned or rented directly by youths. The Transitional Living Program teaches youths to maintain an apartment, budget, prepare meals, find and hold a job, meet educational goals, and build positive relationships. In 1995, there were 78 TLP projects funded by \$13.6 million in federal money with additional funds from the private sector.
- VCO exception** Approved in 1980, the valid court order (VCO) exception to the DSO mandate provided that a runaway could be lawfully detained if he or she violated a VCO set at the discretion of the judge. In 1992, the VCO exception was amended to include the requirement that before a VCO could be issued, an appropriate public social service agency review the behavior that caused the youth to come to the attention of the court before a VCO may be issued.

MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM

Although estimates of the number of runaways vary, most fall between .5 and 1.5 million annually.¹ These estimates rest primarily on the numbers of runaways processed through the judicial system, served by federally- or privately-funded shelters, at street corner drop-in centers, or medical units that address the health needs of adolescents. Each organization captures a different segment of the runaway population. Some runaways neither seek help nor come to the attention of the police, courts, or social service agencies; others will be served by multiple organizations as they receive services first from one agency then another (e.g., transition from a Street Outreach program to a shelter).²

A major difficulty in accurately identifying the magnitude of the runaway problem is that in studies and other published reports, runaways are usually grouped with homeless youths.³ This occurs despite differences in demographic profiles and service needs. The main difference between these two groups is that many runaways have a home to which they can choose to return or have families seeking their return; homeless youths have no such home. Runaways tend to be younger, are more likely to be female, have more supportive connections to their schools, and tend to be away from home for shorter periods compared to their homeless peers.⁴

The counting problem is further complicated by the variety of ways for classifying runaways by family members, police, courts and social service agencies.⁵ Many families

do not immediately report runaways to the authorities. At the state and local levels, the court system may not classify a youth who meets the criteria for running away as a runaway.^{2,3,5} In most jurisdictions, police have broad discretion in charging youths with running away.⁵ Most come to police attention after committing other offenses. Thus, a runaway may be charged with running or with more serious delinquent offenses. The youth may then be counted by the courts under the more serious delinquency charge, and never be reported statistically as a runaway. In other cases, the police may handle the situation informally by simply contacting the youth's family and returning the runaway to parents or guardians without any charges filed.⁵

The Federal Figures

The federal government distinguishes between runaway and homeless youths. The 1989 United States General Accounting Office Report on Homelessness estimates that there are 63,179,000 youths in America.⁶ The report found that 1,027,000 (1.6%) were runaways. Of these, approximately 359,450 (35%) were male, 667,550 (65%) were female.⁶ The United States Department of Justice reported the findings of the National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children in America (NISMART) based on surveys of households, community professionals, juvenile facilities, police records, FBI data, and runaways who returned home.⁷ It reported that 450,700 youths ran away from households and juvenile facilities in 1988.⁷

These youths were identified as "broad scope" runaways – those youths who left home without permission and stayed away overnight, or who were already away and refused to return home. Approximately 66% of these broad scope runaways left home after an argument with a parent, step-parent or caretaker and half returned home voluntarily after a night or two. In 39% of cases, the parents or caretakers knew the whereabouts of the runaway during the episode.⁷ A subgroup of 133,500 "policy focal" runaways from households and juvenile facilities were also identified by the study. These runaways had no secure or familiar places to stay, and were at risk and in need of immediate intervention.⁷

The NISMART study counts separately the estimated 127,100 "throwaway" youths who were told to leave home, not allowed back, who were abandoned, or whose parents or step-parents made no efforts to retrieve them.⁷ A second NISMART study is in progress and results are expected to be released by OJJDP in early 2000.⁸

PROFILES OF RUNAWAYS

Which kids are more likely run away from home? What factors come together to prompt such a decision? What characterizes the home lives of these young people? An adolescent's normal developmental need to separate from the family and explore the world on his or her own terms, coupled with impulsivity, may predispose some adolescents toward running. Organizations serving runaways report that runaways are a

diverse group typically ranging in age from 10 to 18 years. Approximately 85% are between the ages of 14 and 17 years.⁹ Many come from homes characterized by poor communication, physical or sexual abuse, mental illness, substance abuse, or strained resources.³ Females typically run at an earlier age than do males. The common denominator is that the runaway finds his or her home life intolerable and makes a choice to leave home. Youths with multiple running episodes tend to stay away longer each time they run.⁷ According to the Department of Health and Human Services, fewer than 10% of runaways are prepared to live independently.¹⁰ Most youths who run away from home remain within 50 or 100 miles; 1 in 14 leaves the State. Of youths who ran from juvenile facilities, half left the State, one-third were picked up by the police, and 1 in 10 was jailed.⁷

Family Conflict and Abuse

Communication and family conflict are often cited as the main reasons given by youths for running.^{11,12} *The Report to the Congress on the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program of the Family and Youth Services Bureau for Fiscal Years 1993 and 1994* found that approximately 50% of youths in shelters reported troubled family relationships. In an extensive survey of Los Angeles County runaways, homeless youths, social service agency personnel, and providers of outreach services and health services, 73% identified poor family communication as their main reason for running, 39% reported sexual abuse

(typically by a step-parent or mother's boyfriend), and 26% reported physical abuse.¹¹ Approximately 66% of runaways lived with 2 parents before leaving home and going to a shelter, 31% came from one-parent households, and in 3% of cases, no parents were identified as head-of-household.⁴ A longitudinal study based in the Midwest reported that approximately 18% of arrested runaways had been physically or sexually abused as children under age 11.¹³ These differences suggest that the prevalence of physical and sexual abuse among a sample of Los Angeles runaways is higher than its prevalence in a Midwest runaway population. In general, estimates of the prevalence of physical or sexual abuse of runaways center around 15% to 40%.^{10,11,14}

Other forms of family discord are associated with running away. A California study found that 66% of runaways left homes having parents divorced, separated or widowed before the child's 12th birthday.² Approximately 75% of runaways had lost one or both parents within 5 years prior to running. Gay and lesbian youths appear to be at greater risk of conflicted relationships with families and may feel more isolated than do other youths.^{1, 12, 15, 16} The National Network of Runaway and Homeless Youth Services (1991) reported that 6% of runaways self-identified as gay.¹ However, this figure may be an underestimate because youths may be uncertain of their orientation or reluctant to disclose their sexual identity.¹

Plass and Hotelling identified an intergenerational pattern to running using a subset of NISMART subjects.¹⁷ In a 1995 study of 332 children aged 10-18 years,

24% of parents of runaways had run away themselves versus 11% of parents of non-runaways.¹⁷ Thus, children of runaways were more than twice as likely to run away than were children whose parents had not run. These investigators note that it is likely that the parents recreated the struggles and conflicts that led to their own running behavior.¹⁷ Children not only live in home situations created by their parents, but also learn coping strategies to deal with these situations from their parents.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

The 1995 Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) report described the prevalence of drug use among families of youths in shelters, those interviewed on the street, and those living in households.¹⁸ Among respondents in the household and shelter samples, 35% reported marijuana use and 21% reported using other drugs. In contrast, the prevalence of using marijuana or other drugs among youths in the street sample was nearly 70% and 40%, respectively.¹⁸ Drug abuse by family members was also cited by the FYSB report as a primary reason why youths ran away from home. The FYSB report showed that 31% of young persons in shelters and 45% of those in the street sample reported familial substance abuse during the month preceding the youth leaving home.

According to the General Accounting Office report on runaway and homeless youths, 16% of runaways abused drugs or alcohol.⁴ Based on interviews with runaways in shelters, Windle found that alcohol and substance abuse was common among this

group.¹⁹ Juveniles who ran away from home multiple times consumed more alcohol, had more alcohol-related aggressive behavior, and more than seven times the rate of illegal drug use than juveniles with only a single running episode.¹⁹ Of young persons calling the National Runaway Switchboard, 5% identified drug or alcohol abuse, either by themselves or their parents as the main reason for the call.²⁰

School-Related Problems

The relationship between difficulty in school and running is complex and school problems may precede or precipitate running.² Runaways tend to be below average in academic performance.² More than 70% of males and 44% of females in a New York City shelter sample that included runaways had been expelled from school at least once. In this sample, 55% of male and 47% of female youths had repeated a grade in school.² In a cohort of 103 runaways, 32% had changed schools within 3 months prior to running.²¹ Difficulty in school may reflect conduct problems or learning disabilities. School problems may also reflect poor social skills and a disruption in the child's ability to develop supportive relationships with peers and adults.

HAZARDS FACED BY RUNAWAYS

Problems faced by youths prior to their running, such as conflicted or chaotic relationships, substance abuse, physical or sexual victimization, academic difficulties,

and mental or physical health problems are often exacerbated once the runaway reaches the streets. Runaways generally arrive on the streets with little or no money, and few survival skills or other resources of their own. According to Rotheram-Borus et al, about half of the youths interviewed in New York City shelters in 1991 had difficulty satisfying even their most basic needs.²¹ Coates notes that teens are too old to get help from child protection agencies, too young to qualify for legal emancipation, and do not qualify for welfare benefits.²² The vulnerability of runaways on the streets, on the one hand makes them targets for criminals, and on the other hand, some runaways turn to crime. The National Runaway Switchboard estimates that 5,000 runaway and homeless youths who live on the street die every year from violence, suicide, or illness.²⁰

Difficulty Earning a Living

Few runaways are able to find and keep legitimate employment on their own. Most are too young to be legally employed, do not have adequate job skills, or are unable to work legally because they do not have proper documentation (e.g., Social Security cards, working papers, etc.).²² A substantial proportion of those who remain on the streets eventually succumb to involvement in some type of criminal activity such as shoplifting, credit card fraud, burglary and robbery, assault, or prostitution.²² In Los Angeles, nearly 40% of runaways interviewed said that they earned their income through illegal activities as part of their adaptation to street life.¹⁰ Of the 25% "hard-core"

runaways identified in this Los Angeles study, 75% survived by engaging in criminal activity; of these half were prostitutes. According to Rothman, 24% of runaways had at least one arrest versus 11% of non-runaways.³

Physical and Sexual Assault

Many runaways are physically and sexually assaulted after running away from home. In a 1990 study of 84 runaway and homeless youths in a Midwestern city, more than 40% reported having been beaten up while on the streets, 23% reported having been robbed, approximately 40% of females and 10% of males reported having been sexually assaulted, and nearly 20% of females and 40% of males reported having been assaulted with a weapon between the time they ran away and sought shelter.²³

Health Problems and Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Runaways have serious health problems often linked to their runaway status and high-risk behaviors, such as drug use and prostitution. When runaways do seek medical treatment, it may be inadequate for a variety of reasons. The runaway may provide an insufficient medical history and may not disclose active substance abuse or risky behaviors for fear of being judged or reported to social service agencies.^{21, 24} Other runaways may fail to complete a full course of prescribed treatment because they do not

understand the need to follow the recommendations or because their lives are too disorganized to comply with medical recommendations or follow-up care.²⁵

A common reason for runaways to seek medical care is for treatment of sexually transmitted diseases.²⁶ Runaways appear to be a more sexually active group than are their non-runaway peers, even prior to running. Rotheram-Borus found that among minority runaways in New York City shelters in a 1992 study, 37% of males and 13% of females had at least 10 sexual partners compared to 7% of males and 5% of females in a national non-runaway sample.²⁶ Rotheram-Borus et al found that this group had sexual experiences at a younger age, engaged in unprotected sexual activities, and had more sexual partners compared to non-runaways. Only 15% used condoms consistently. She notes that these behaviors may account partially for higher HIV+ rates among runaways. According to Rotheram-Borus, the prevalence of HIV+ was approximately 6% in New York City and 12% in San Francisco samples of predominantly Black and Hispanic runaway and homeless youths between 1988 and 1990.²⁶

The practice of "survival sex"—the trading of sexual favors for food, shelter or other necessities— is also common. Runaways have higher rates of HIV infection and AIDS.²⁶ Of the runaways interviewed in Los Angeles, 26% said they engaged in survival sex compared to less than 2% of non-runaways. Studies based on New York City samples found that 13% of males and 7% of females reported engaging in survival sex.²⁶ Pennbridge et al. found that between 50% and 71% of runaways reported having a

sexually transmitted disease. HIV+ runaways, especially those who don't appear to be sick, may have unprotected sex and, in turn, infect others.¹⁶

Female runaways risk the added consequence of pregnancy.²⁴ Although the number of unplanned pregnancies among female runaways is unknown, Reuler found that most street youths do not use contraceptives.²⁷ Pennbridge et al note that pregnant runaways are at high risk for medical complications due to poor nutrition and poor prenatal care.²⁴

Mental Health Problems

Runaways whose mental health problems, including trauma and depression, were a predisposing factor in running away, continue to be plagued by these problems after leaving home or juvenile facilities. The stress of living with a history of abuse or neglect at home, coupled with the emotional demands of life on the street or at some shelter environments easily can overwhelm the runaway. Of the 576 runaways studied in New York City by Rotheram-Borus, 90 reported current suicidal thoughts, and 214 said they had attempted suicide at least once.²⁸ Of these 214 youths, 81 had been hospitalized and approximately 75 entered psychotherapy because of their suicide attempt.²⁸

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Runaways are also at increased risk of substance abuse.¹⁹ This rise may be owed to a drug habit that preceded running or it may be a way for runaways to cope with street life. Among runaways with alcohol problems, researchers found that most began drinking at a younger age compared to non-runaways, and were removed from their homes by authorities in greater numbers than were non-abusing youths.¹⁹ As might be expected, alcohol-abusing youths had more difficulty meeting basic survival needs on their own.¹⁹

FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION ADDRESSING RUNAWAYS

Approaches to Handling Runaways: A Brief History

Current attitudes and approaches toward runaways reflect changing social, legal, and public policies. In the years before the juvenile courts were established, children who broke the law were tried as adults.²⁹ Many convicted of crimes were sentenced to adult prisons. Gradually, social attitudes shifted the focus of the courts from punishment to the treatment of juveniles who came to the attention of the court system. In the late 1890s, the first juvenile courts were established.²⁹ These courts could investigate the child's home situation and educational needs, and order the youth and his or her family to follow the courts' recommendations.^{3, 29} The Children's Bureau, established by Congress in 1912, was the first Federal agency charged with overseeing the activities of, and

developing national standards for, these emerging state juvenile court systems^{3, 30} By 1925, only Utah and Texas did not have state juvenile courts.³⁰ According to the Utah Attorney General Public Affairs Office, the Utah juvenile court was created in 1957.³¹ Texas has no state-wide juvenile court system. According to a 1973 Texas law, each county determines which court within that county will hear juvenile cases.³²

Despite the widespread establishment of juvenile courts, no comprehensive federal policy agenda for juvenile justice was available until the early 1960s.²² The policy agenda that emerged during the 1960s arose in response to a sharp increase in youth crime, along with a belief by the proponents of the "Great Society" that juvenile offenders were a product of breakdowns within the family and society as a whole.²² Beginning in California in 1961, and following throughout the 1960s, several state courts began to recognize distinctions between different kinds of juvenile crime. The source of problems leading to running behavior was first viewed as stemming from deficiencies in the youths themselves. This shifted to disturbances in the social structure in which runaways were functioning, and finally to the family system and a combination of sources.

The Concept of Status Offenses

When the person who runs is a juvenile, running away from home is a "status offense." It is the age of the offender that makes specific behaviors "status offenses"

which fall under the purview of the juvenile justice system.⁵ Other status offenses include school truancy, incorrigibility or ungovernability, curfew violations, possession, purchase, or consumption of alcohol, or tobacco violations.³³ In contrast to status offenses, delinquent offenses are those acts committed by juveniles which, if committed by adults, would lead to criminal prosecution.³³ Delinquent acts are viewed by the legal system as more serious than status offenses and include crimes against persons or property, drug offenses, and crimes against public order, such as weapons violations, nonviolent sex offenses, and disorderly conduct.³³ The newly recognized "status offenses" allowed the courts to separate "delinquents" from "persons in need of supervision" (PINS).^{22,33} In some states, these persons are referred to as "children in need of supervision" (CHINS) or "juveniles in need of supervision" (JINS).²²

The federal government expanded the distinction between status and delinquent offenses in its landmark Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) of 1974.³⁴ The JJDPA provided for very limited placement of status offenders in secure lockups for detention and correction, promoted separation of status and criminal offenders through the courts and in disposition options, and diverted status offenders from formal juvenile justice proceedings. The deinstitutionalization of status offenders (DSO) mandate set the tone for handling runaways, avoiding both labeling these youths as criminal and exposing them to more serious delinquent and criminal offenders. The JJDPA supported innovative prevention programs and community-based alternatives to juvenile incarceration and established formula grants to states and local public and private

agencies.³⁴ It linked state court acceptance of federal definitions of specific status offenses with eligibility for grant money to help prevent juvenile crime and to provide services to status offenders and youths at risk.

The JJDPA also provided for the creation of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) within the Department of Justice. It expanded the ability of other Federal agencies to coordinate their services with the new juvenile justice programs.³⁴ For example, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare was authorized to administer Title III of the JJDPA, the Runaway Youth Act, which provided grant money to support runaway shelters and coordinated networks of youth shelters and outreach services. The Runaway Youth Act was later renamed the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) as it expanded to authorize services to homeless youth, in addition to runaways. It encouraged greater parental involvement in counseling and urged centers to work with the local school systems to encourage youths to stay in school. These programs were viewed as cost-effective in assisting troubled youth and their families.

Congress has made many amendments to the JJDPA. In 1977, Congress amended the Act to include youths who committed no offense, but who needed the protection of the court because they were themselves victims of abuse or neglect (i.e., non-offenders). Later amendments removed the requirement that youths diverted from jails and institutions be placed in shelters.³⁴ In 1980, Congress enacted the requirement that status offenders and non-offenders be removed from secure detention and correctional facilities,

and that juveniles not be detained in adult jails and police lockups.³⁴ Congress also approved the valid court order (VCO) exception to the deinstitutionalization of status offenders in 1984. Under the VCO exception, a runaway could be lawfully detained if he or she violated a VCO set at the discretion of the judge.³⁴ This judicial latitude was restricted after critics complained that judges were using the VCO exception to violate the DSO mandate by setting conditions for runaways that were almost certainly doomed to failure, thus enabling detainment of the runaway by the court.³⁴ In 1992, the VCO exception was amended to include the requirement that before a VCO could be issued, an appropriate public social service agency, other than the court or law enforcement agency, review the behavior that caused the youth to come to the attention of the court. That agency would then determine which dispositions would be inappropriate or unavailable for the specific case, and then submit their conclusions in writing to the court.³⁴

JJDPA amendments also led to the establishment of the Missing Children's Assistance Act, which mandates that the OJJDP maintain a national resource center to assist parents in finding runaways.^{34,35} Through the Missing Children's Assistance Act, parents could have their missing child's name entered into the National Crime Investigation Computer (NCIC) to help search for their child. The OJJDP also lists runaways in the categories of missing children included in the rolls of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. The Center serves as a communication clearinghouse, provides technical assistance training and education, and helps to coordinate agencies.³⁵

The State Level

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) had administrative responsibility for States carrying out the mandates of the JJDPA, but the initial application of JJDPA guidelines was not uniform between or within states.^{35,36} Although states generally accepted, in theory, the reforms mandated by the JJDPA, state officials expressed concern that the Act required them to undertake costly and controversial changes in their policies and practices without sufficient federal support. The states feared that federal funding for JJDPA mandates would not meet the state's actual costs incurred in shifting juvenile justice priorities.³⁵ These fears were partially well-grounded as comparisons of authorized and appropriated funding levels for the JJDPA show wide discrepancies from its inception. In 1975, although the JJDPA was funded at \$75 million, Congress appropriated only \$25 million. In 1980, despite an authorization of \$200 million, Congress appropriated only \$100 million. Appropriations did not again reach the \$100 million mark until 1995, even though Congress was authorized to spend \$150 million to support programs consistent with the JJDPA.³⁴

States objecting to the DSO mandate complained that their individual state constitutions and statutes lacked the authority to implement the DSO requirement.³⁴ Many states expressed concern that the infrastructure of community-based and private sector programs and services would need to be in place as a prerequisite to DSO compliance, but state resources were inadequate, especially in rural states with few juvenile service options.²⁹ The states also argued that the federal government would, after

mandating changes at the State level, again shift its focus and force States to abandon DSO compliance efforts.

The preliminary analysis of states' 1992 monitoring reports showed that 5 achieved full DSO compliance and 29 were in full compliance with minimal exceptions, 7 states submitted reports that were being reviewed by OJJDP, 6 states and the District of Columbia had not yet submitted reports, and 1 state was not required to submit a report because it began participating in the JJDPa just that year. Only 2 states (Kentucky and Wyoming) declined participation.³⁴

Police Responses to Runaways

Police often are on the front line in runaway cases. They typically are notified that a youth has run away from home by a phone call from the family of the runaway. These calls may be transferred to a specialized juvenile division, to police officers in non-specialized units, or to paraprofessionals or community service officers.⁵ Police may enter information about the runaway and the circumstances of the running into the National Crime Information Computer and notify officers on the street to keep a lookout for the runaway. Some police departments act on the matter quickly, believing that early interception provides the best chance of swift and safe return of the juvenile to his or her family. Other departments may take a "wait and see" approach and not launch a full investigation, believing, as mentioned earlier, that most juveniles return home within

48 hours. To look for a runaway and bring that juvenile back "prematurely" would only overburden existing police resources and might precipitate another run.⁵ This approach views running as relatively minor compared to criminal activity and resources are directed accordingly. In cases of repeat runaways, police departments may recommend that parents wait for a couple of days before filing a report, or the police may attempt to locate the runaway without a formal report taken.⁵

In some cases, police view runaways not as youths in need of help, but as potential victimizers who have put themselves at risk and who will soon prey on others for money for drugs or basic necessities.³⁷ Mutual mistrust is the core of this adversarial relationship between the police and the runaway.

The JJDPa has been a major determinant of police practice regarding runaways. The DSO mandate has restricted some police options in handling status offenders, specifically incarceration. According to Maxson, states that underwent substantial changes in their juvenile justice codes as a result of JJDPa typically decreased their handling of runaway cases and reported less desire to divert and counsel status offenders. Some departments transferred the responsibility to social service agencies and focused only on specific types of cases (e.g., very young missing children).⁵ This may be due to police views not only of runaways, but of their own roles and responsibilities to this population. Because runaways are not criminals, police may view their own involvement in these cases as inappropriate. The limiting power of the JJDPa may serve to reduce the level of police control and, hence, involvement with runaways.⁵

Whether police charge a juvenile with a status or a delinquent offense is crucial in determining if the state is in compliance with the JJDP Act in that specific case. Classifying a juvenile as delinquent may allow a state to institutionalize that juvenile, whereas the same juvenile would not be institutionalized for committing a status offense under DSO guidelines.⁵ Some states allow status offenders to be securely detained for up to 24 hours, other states hold them for longer periods. In California, runaways are allowed to be detained while law enforcement officials check for outstanding warrants and attempt to find the runaway's parents.³ The police and courts have been accused of upgrading charges against a juvenile (e.g., charging a runaway who may or may not be engaged in prostitution with the crime of prostitution) in order to detain that runaway without violating the DSO mandate.⁵

Court Responses to Runaways

For a juvenile court to intercede, a parent, guardian, agency, or other interested person must file a petition alleging that a juvenile is in violation of the law. Juvenile Court Statistics 1995, published by the OJJDP, provides a national estimate of juvenile court activity between 1986 and 1995.³⁸ The report describes approximately 1.7 million delinquency cases and 146,400 status offense cases handled 1995.³⁸ It does not present national estimates of informally handled status offense cases. This is because in many jurisdictions a complaint about a juvenile is brought by an agency outside of the juvenile court system and the case continues to be diverted or handled outside of the system.

Cases handled in this manner may never come to the attention of the court and, therefore, are not included in these court statistics. OJJDP notes that status offense cases, in particular, tend to be diverted from court processing.

In 1995, the juvenile courts handled approximately 146,400 status offense cases nationwide, representing a 63% increase from the 89,700 cases handled in 1991.³⁸ Of the 146,400 status offense cases, approximately 23,900 (16%) involved runaways. This represents a 54% increase in the number of runaway cases from approximately 15,500 cases reported in 1991. Of the 23,900 runaway petitions filed in 1995, an estimated 10,038 (42%) were adjudicated by juvenile courts. In an adjudicated case, a judge makes a formal ruling and declares the youth involved to be a status offender. In a nonadjudicated case, a judge makes a case disposition, but does not label the youth involved as a status offender. Proportionally fewer runaway cases (42%) were adjudicated compared to truancy and liquor law cases (53%), ungovernable cases (54%), and miscellaneous cases (46%), such as curfew and tobacco law violations.³⁸

Table 1 shows the 1995 juvenile case dispositions listed by type of status offense for adjudicated and nonadjudicated cases. Approximately 27% of adjudicated runaways were granted out-of-home placements in foster care, group residences, or residential treatment facilities, nearly 54% were granted formal probation by the court, and 10% of cases were dismissed.³⁸ In contrast, 62% of nonadjudicated cases were dismissed.

Table 1
1995 Status Offense Case Dispositions
(N=146,400)

Status Offense	Out-of-home	Probation	Counseling	Dismissed
Runaways (N=23,900) (16%)				
Adjudicated (n=10,038)	27%	54%	9%	10%
Non-adjudicated (n=13,862)	1%	8%	29%	62%
Truant (N=37,400) (26%)				
Adjudicated (n=19,822) (53%)	12%	73%	10%	5%
Non-adjudicated (n=17,578)	1%	16%	11%	73%
Ungovernable (N=18,300) (13%)				
Adjudicated (n=9,882) (54%)	27%	61%	9%	3%
Non-adjudicated (n=8,418)	<1%	7%	14%	79%
Liquor Law (N=37,400) (53%)				
Adjudicated (n=19,822) (26%)	7%	57%	34%	2%
Non-adjudicated (n=17,578)	<1%	22%	29%	49%
Miscellaneous (N=29,300) (20%)				
Adjudicated (n=13,478) (46%)	---	---	---	---
Non-adjudicated (n=15,822)				

Source: Sickmund MA, Stahl A, Finnegan T, Snyder H, Poole R, & Butts J. (1998). Juvenile Court Statistics 1995. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice.

Runaways were detained between court intake and case disposition in greater proportions than were juveniles in any other status offense category. In general, runaways pose considerable challenge to compliance with the mandate to deinstitutionalize status offenders. The central policy issue hinges on secure confinement to protect the runaway from possible harm on the streets and to assure that the youth will appear in court. Runaways are more apt to be securely detained by the authorities than are any other type of status offender. Critics have alleged that courts have confined runaways for lengthy periods before their formal hearings because, once adjudicated, the court may lose its authority to order secure placement of the runaway.⁵ In 1995, approximately 9,900 petitioned status offense cases involved detention.³⁸ Of these, nearly 2,900 (29%) involved runaways (Table 2). Runaway cases peaked at ages 15 and 16 years, then substantially decreased by age 17.³⁸ The age of the runaway did not play a significant role in detainment. Although the percentage of detained petitioned status offense cases declined between 1991 and 1995 from 62% to 52% among juveniles aged 15 years or younger, and from 59% to 47% among juveniles 16 years or older, the proportion of runaways detained remained constant or slightly increased.³⁸

Case dispositions varied among offense categories, with adjudicated runaways granted out-of-home placement more frequently than were juveniles in nearly all other offense categories. In 1995, there were 11,500 status offense cases resulting in

Table 2

Status Offense Cases Involving Detention 1991 and 1995

STATUS OFFENSE	1991 (N=7,200)	1995 (N=9,900)
Runaway	2,400 (33%)	2,900 (29%)
Truancy	700 (10%)	700 (7%)
Ungovernability	900 (12%)	1,300 (13%)
Liquor Law	1,500 (21%)	2,400 (25%)
Miscellaneous	1,800 (24%)	2,600 (26%)

Note: Numbers appear to have been rounded

Source: Sickmund MA, Stahl A, Finnegan T, Snyder H, Poole R, & Butts J. (1998). Juvenile Court Statistics 1995. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice.

out-of-home placement, a 41% increase from the estimated 8,100 cases in 1991.³⁸

Runaways showed a 48% increase in out-of-home placement from 1,800 in 1991 to 2,700 in 1995.³⁸

Approximately 41,200 adjudicated status offense cases were placed on formal probation in 1995.³⁸ This represents a 47% increase in the number of runaways granted formal probation from 3,700 cases reported by juvenile courts nationwide in 1991 to 5,500 cases reported in 1995. Of the 41,200 cases that resulted in formal probation in 1995, approximately 5,500 (13%) involved runaways.³⁸

Juvenile court statistics show gender differences in runaway cases. Of the nearly 146,400 status offense cases reported in 1995, approximately 85,800 (59%) cases involved males and 60,500 (41%) involved females. Among runaways, however, an estimated 14,400 (60%) of cases involved females. Male runaways accounted for nearly 11% of male status offense cases. In contrast, female runaways accounted for nearly 24% of female status offense cases.³⁸ Gender did not strongly affect detainment or case disposition among runaways. Approximately 13% of male and 12% of female runaways were detained in 1995. An estimated 44% of male and 41% of female runaway cases were adjudicated. Of the adjudicated runaway cases in 1995, approximately 30% of males and 25% of females were granted out-of-home placement. Approximately 52% of males and 56% of females were granted formal probation by the juvenile court.³⁸

Juvenile court statistics show small racial differences in the proportions of white and black runaways. The number of white runaways increased 66% from 10,800 in 1991 to 18,100 in 1995. The number of black runaways increased 39% from 3,600 in 1991 to 5,000 in 1995. (Table 3).³⁸

The percentage of detained status offense cases varied little by race as 12% of white, 13% of black, and 11% of runaways of other races were detained. Juvenile court statistics also showed little variation in case disposition as 42% of cases involving whites and blacks were adjudicated, 26% of whites and 30% of blacks were granted out-of-home placements, and 54% of whites and 56% of blacks were granted formal probation.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR RUNAWAYS

Programs Funded by the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB)

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act provides for funding of runaway services across the country through the Basic Center Program, the Transitional Living Program, and the Drug Abuse Prevention Program for Runaway and Homeless Youth.³⁹ The Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) administers grants for these three programs which support community-based public and private agencies. Table 4 shows funding information for Fiscal Year 1995.³⁹

Basic Centers provide outreach, emergency shelter, temporary housing, meals, clothing, counseling, assess needs of runaways, identify aftercare services, provide

Table 3

Runaways by Race in 1991 and 1995

RACE	Number of runaways 1991	Number of runaways 1995	% Change
White	10,800	18,100	66%
Black	3,600	5,000	39%

Source: Sickmund MA, Stahl A, Finnegan T, Snyder H, Poole R, & Butts J. (1998). *Juvenile Court Statistics 1995*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice.

Table 4

Families and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) Funding Fiscal Year 1995 (Dollars are in millions)			
	Basic Center Program	Transitional Living Program	Drug Abuse Prevention Program
Total funding appropriated	\$40.5	\$13.6	\$14.5
Total grant funds	\$37.1	\$13.2	\$12.6
# Basic Center grants	366	78	131
New start grant funds	\$14.5	\$6.6	\$5.5
# New start grants	138	36	60
Continuation grant funds	\$21.9	\$6.6	\$7.0
# continuation grants	228	42	71
Demonstration grant funds	\$0.7	-	-
# Demonstration grants	8	-	-
Admin./Other expenses	\$3.4	\$0.4	\$1.9

Source: Office of Management and Budget 1998 federal budget detail.
Information downloaded from the OMB website searchable database of
federal publications. (Latest update 12/9/97).

referrals, attempt to contact parents or guardians and, wherever possible, reunite families. These centers network with law enforcement agencies, schools, and other community agencies. In 1995, approximately \$40.5 million was appropriated to fund 366 Basic Centers, 138 of which were new start grants (FYSB, 1996). According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, the appropriation for the Basic Center program increased to approximately \$44 million in 1996 and supported over 375 Basic Center projects nationwide.³⁹ Grant funds are allocated based on a state's population under age 18 years.

The Transitional Living Program helps youths aged 16-21 years to develop skills for independent living and limits dependency on social services. Living situations include host family homes, group homes, and supervised apartments that may be agency-owned or rented directly by youths and sponsored by the Transitional Living Program. Skills focus on maintaining an apartment, budgeting, cooking, finding and maintaining a job, meeting educational goals, and building positive relationships. Approximately \$13.6 million was appropriated for the Transitional Living Program in 1995 to support 78 projects, 36 of which were started that year. In 1996, Congress appropriated \$15 million for this program. Basic Center and Transitional Living Project grantees are required to provide non-federal matching funds of 10% of the grant amount. The maximum grant for a 3-year project period for Basic Center and Transitional Living Programs is \$600,000.³⁹

Under the Drug Abuse Prevention Project, FYSB administered \$14.5 million for 131 grants, 60 of which were new start grants in 1995. FYSB also awarded grants under the Street Outreach Program designed to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation of runaway and homeless youth.³⁹

FYSB tracked approximately 55,000 young people who received services through FYSB-funded programs in 1995. Of these people, 32,708 (59%) required basic support services such as food (92%), shelter (88%), and clothing (42%). Basic Centers provided various forms of counseling services to 44,492 (81%). Many (30,814 or 56%) required life skills training, including communication skills (87%), conflict resolution skills (85%), and life planning (64%).¹⁸

FYSB reported that 17,417 (32%) young people participated in substance abuse prevention services (43% substance abuse screening; 82% in educational activities and information). Data showed that 5,807 (11%) participated in substance abuse-related support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and Alanon.¹⁸

Of the 15,395 youths requiring health care, Basic Centers provided medical and psychiatric services to 65% and 24%, respectively. In addition, 40% participated in specialized services, such as prenatal, dental and HIV/AIDS-related treatment. Basic Centers also provided educational services to 13,875 (25%) participating youths, including assessment (47%), tutoring (43%), and alternative education (40%).¹⁸

The 8,233 participants in Basic Center programs who reportedly could not return home found alternative placements. Of the 3,200 young people who required employment services, 67% received career counseling, 36% participated in employment referral and placement, and 28% received job training.¹⁸

The National Runaway Switchboard

One of the main points of contact between runaways and services is the National Runaway Switchboard. Runaways who want to call home can use the 24-hour Switchboard to place a no-cost phone call to parents or caretakers. Because the Switchboard is linked to a computerized directory of more than 10,000 service agencies and non-computerized resource directories of more than 120,000 organizations throughout the United States, it serves as a central information source for runaways and their families.¹⁸ It also acts as a message delivery service and can arrange conference calls among runaways, families, and agency staff members. The Switchboard also provides confidential information, referral, and counseling.^{9,20}

During 1995, the National Switchboard received approximately 140,000 calls. Of those, 46% were from youths, 31% from parents, and the remaining calls from relatives, professionals, and other interested persons. More than 70% of calls resulted in referrals to approximately 90,000 service providers. In 1996, the National Runaway Switchboard received approximately 160,000 calls or nearly 440 calls daily.^{9,20}

Based on the 1995 FYSB Report to Congress, 22% of callers to the Switchboard were male.⁹ That proportion increased to 26% in 1996.⁹ Data also showed a three-fold increase in the proportion of callers who were age 10 years or younger, from 1.5% in 1995 to 4.3% in 1996. The majority of callers were in the 14-17 year age bracket in both 1995 and 1996 (43.6% and 50.5%, respectively).⁹ The proportion of youths who contacted the Switchboard within 1-3 days of leaving home decreased from 50.6% in 1995 to 37.4% in 1996.⁹ The Switchboard also reported changes in the reasons cited for calling. Calls for family problems decreased from 42% in 1995 to 39% in 1996, as did reports of abuse (15% to 11%), and depression and thoughts of suicide (11% to 7%).⁹ The number of calls from youths who wanted to return home, but could not afford to travel increased from 1.2% in 1995 to 6% in 1996.⁹

Approximately 57% of youths reported that to survive they depended on friends or relatives, 11% sought shelters, 7% resorted to begging or sleeping in public places, 1% engaged in prostitution, and fewer than 1% reported stealing or selling drugs. In 23% of cases, youths did not disclose their means of survival.⁹

The National Runaway Switchboard operates an information and outreach program known as KIDS CALL. Through this program, Switchboard staff talk with educators and groups about runaway and homeless youth issues, including alternatives to running and how to find needed services.²⁰ The program also provides a curriculum guide with videos for children in grades 6-12.²⁰

The KidsCall Program

Another phone contact resource for runaways is KidsCall, started in 1992 by AT&T and Travelers Aid International.⁴⁰ Despite the similarity in names, this program is not part of the National Runaway Switchboard program (KIDS CALL) mentioned above. The goal of the privately-funded KidsCall program, administered by the Travelers' Aid Society is to encourage runaways to reconnect with their communities and either return home or go to a supportive environment. Runaways can visit any Travelers Aid location and will be given a free phone call home or to a relative. For those who wish to return home, Travelers Aid arranges free transportation. For runaways who choose not to return home, Travelers Aid can make referrals to shelters or other agencies.⁴⁰

The HOME FREE Program

Runaways who want to return home, but don't have travel money can use Greyhound's HOME FREE Program, started in 1987 and administered by the National Runaway Switchboard.⁴¹ To qualify for this program, a person must be between 12 and 18 years old, and be willing to return home to a parent or guardian who must file a runaway report. Following a conference call through the National Switchboard between the youth and his or her parent or guardian, plus verification of the runaway report, Greyhound will issue a free ticket home from any of over 2,500 locations.⁴¹ Between 1995 and 1997, approximately 4,268 tickets were issued.⁴²

The Safe Place Cities Program

Businesses have joined forces with private and non-profit organizations to help runaways through the Safe Place Cities Program, founded in 1983 by the YMCA Center for Youth Alternatives in Louisville, Kentucky.⁴³ The program has grown through YMCA, corporate sponsorship and volunteers to serve youths in 31 states and nearly 200 cities nationwide. Through this program, businesses such as stores, pizza shops, arcades and other venues that typically draw young people put Safe Place signs in their windows. If a youth visits a "safe place" location and asks for aid, the employees are trained to give that person a comfortable place to wait and to call one of the identified shelters or contact sites that will, in turn, send a staff member or specially trained volunteer to the location to meet with the youth.⁴³

Health Service Networks

Runaways in need of medical care are offered treatment at a variety of health clinics, including mobile health clinics, across the country. Runaways may be willing to seek medical treatment even when they may be reluctant to seek other kinds of assistance directly.⁴⁴ This willingness provides an opportunity for health professionals to offer both medical and non-medical interventions and to refer runaways to appropriate agencies to help address their problems.⁴⁴ Children's Hospital of Los Angeles has provided a model for serving the health needs of runaway and homeless youths. Since 1982, the Division

of Adolescent Medicine, Children's Hospital of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Free Clinic, have worked together to provide a wide range of free health care services to youths aged 12-24 years.¹⁰ Over half of the young people seen at the High Risk Youth Clinic live in shelters or on the streets.^{10,45}

Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Inc.

Started in 1970, Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Inc. in Boston, MA, provides a model for serving runaway and homeless youths.⁴⁶ According to Bridge's 1996 Annual Report, nearly 4,000 young people were served with a budget of \$2.5 million and expenses totaling approximately \$2 million.⁴⁶ The majority of expenses were for residential programs (\$566,000), runaway/counseling/streetwork (\$467,000), and educational and vocational programs (\$240,000).⁴⁶ Bridge offers outreach, medical and dental services, counseling, a transitional day treatment program, job training, educational and pre-employment programs, and residential programs.⁴⁷ These residential programs include the Single Parent Home and Phase II Cooperative Apartments which provide up to 1 year of less formal supervision in apartments headed by youths.⁴⁷ It also operates a hotline which logged approximately 22,000 calls in 1997, and provided referrals to approximately 225 agencies, including hospitals, mental health centers, and multi-cultural services. In addition, Bridge operates a mobile health care van supported by the United Way, which targets its services to young people under age 25 years.⁴⁷ In 1997, the

medical van reported 2,265 medical visits by youths and 8,444 non-medical visits.⁴⁸

Bridge is establishing a database of youths served. According to Bridge staff, outcome studies are in the planning stage.⁴⁷

Covenant House

Covenant House is the largest non-federally funded program serving runaway and homeless youths.⁴⁹ According to the Covenant House 1997 Annual Report, 85% of its \$83 million budget came from contributions from approximately 750,000 individuals and corporate donors.⁴⁹ In 1997, Covenant House reported serving approximately 48,000 youths. This consisted of 13,000 who came to Covenant House crisis shelters and the Rights of Passage program which provides job training and transitional living assistance to runaway and homeless youths 18-21 years old.⁴⁹ Approximately 14,500 youths received help through community service centers, and 21,000 were served by street outreach workers. In addition, Covenant House responded to an estimated 87,000 calls to their 24-hour emergency hotline.⁴⁹ During its 25-year history, it has served an estimated 428,000 young people. There are branches of Covenant House in several states across the country. Each branch has a pastoral staff, chapel, and program for youths.⁴⁹

Covenant House has accumulated statistical and demographic data. It's staff is developing a comprehensive profile of youths seeking services which will reportedly contain data on over 70,000 individuals.⁴⁹

Prevention Programs

The American Youth Policy Forum guide entitled *Some Things Do Make A Difference for Youth: A Compendium of Evaluations of Youth Programs and Practices* identifies several programs that target at-risk youths.⁵⁰ The majority of programs outlined focus on such risk factors as academic problems and dropping out of school. Several programs, including the Alternative Schools Demonstration Project, the School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program, the Dropout Prevention and Re-entry Projects in Vocational Education, and the Youth Opportunities Unlimited and Youth Fair Chance demonstration projects, help to reduce the rate of school truancy and the number of students who drop out of school.⁵⁰ Although the direct impact on reducing runaway behavior cannot be estimated, effecting one of the major risk factors for running likely reduced the level of family conflict, increased social support for at-risk students and may, in turn, have diverted youths from running away from home.⁵⁰

OUTCOME STUDIES

The core questions that will determine the success of programs or help to identify gaps in services address issues such as: How many runaways returned home and what were the changes in home environments as a result of program participation? How many runaways found stable, appropriate housing in group homes, foster care, cooperative apartments, or independent living situations? Were these youths able to maintain households, to cook and budget time and money? How did interventions affect

educational outcomes? Were runaways able to acquire job skills and training that enabled them to find and maintain jobs? Did interventions reduce the incidence of drug and alcohol abuse? Were runaways able to develop stable, healthy, and supportive relationships?

Identifying the success of runaway services has been a difficult and evolving task. Our extensive search for long-term studies or program outcome reports revealed that little or no follow-up data were available on the vast majority of youths who received shelter, outreach or other services designed to aid runaway youths. This dearth of outcome information is surprising given the large body of literature describing scope of the problem, and the millions of dollars in federal, state, local and private resources committed to addressing the needs of runaways. In the few reports that we located that did include some outcome information, the information provided was typically limited to projected treatment plans for youths leaving shelters. However, few studies verified whether the youths followed the post-shelter service recommendations.

In 1989, the United States General Accounting Office (GAO) released the largest of the early follow-up reports on runaway and homeless youths in America. The report stated that 58% of youths served at federally-funded shelters planned to live with parents or family members after leaving those shelters.⁶ The report did not provide data on the circumstances surrounding whether or not the youths return home; what, if any, home- or family-based services were implemented, and whether or not the return home was a positive step for the runaway.

A national outcome study published in 1993 by the Urban Institute was limited by the small, non-representative sample upon which the results were based.⁵¹ According to the investigators, the method of sampling and the small sample size limited the generalizability of the results of this study. The results were based on a final sample of 127 subjects who spent at least one night in any of 343 federally-funded Runaway and Homeless Youth Center (RHYC) shelters within the previous two-year period. Approximately 40% of those served were runaways, 18% were homeless and the remainder were placed by the child welfare system for "temporary foster care." Approximately 62% of youths returned home at follow-up. Of the 121 who provided information about family conflict, 105 (87%) reported that their family situation improved. Among the 13 with prior histories of sexual abuse, 7 reported that the situation improved. Youths also reported improvements in financial circumstances (67/127), education (95/127), employment status (38/65), physical health (60/127), mental health (97/127), declines in substance abuse (84/111), and among sexually active youths, the majority (71/103) reported using condoms.⁵¹

In addition to inadequate follow-up, non-representative sampling, and small sample size, investigators have acknowledged other serious limitations of outcome studies. A 1995 evaluation of FYSB-funded intensive home-based intervention models prepared under contract between the Administration on Children, Youth and Families and KRA Corporation strongly criticized program sites for poor study design and insufficient

program staff training in the data collection procedures.⁵² This *Final Report: National Evaluation of Home-Based Services Programs for Runaway Youth*, evaluated the outcome of projects under 2 sets of demonstration grants. The first set of 3-year grants were awarded in 1989 for treatment programs for intact, at-risk families in Baltimore, MD and Nashville, TN. The second set of 3-year grants were awarded in 1991 for runaway prevention programs in Kauai, Hawaii, San Diego, CA, and Tucson, AZ. Services provided by these programs included crisis intervention, family counseling, and referrals. The project report identified problems in the individual subject programs' data collection methods, reporting, and record-keeping.⁵² The Nashville program staff reportedly did not collect data on running away. The Hawaii project reported a reduction in runaway behavior from 23% at the start of the project to 8% at the 6-month follow-up. Due to the lack of a comparison group, however, it was not possible to directly attribute improvements to interventions.

Among their overall program criticisms, the KRA report writers said the San Diego site did not collect follow-up data on most youths in either the home- or shelter-based services programs, although the program's data showed approximately 54% of home-based youths moved out of home compared to 25% of shelter youths. The investigators stated that this is presumably because shelter youths had already left home. The issue of whether runaways were or would be better served by home-based or shelter-based services was never directly addressed by staff at the Nashville, Tucson, or Hawaii projects.⁵² Staff at the demonstration sites "did not adequately document the type

or degree of services provided per subject. This makes it impossible to link the needs of youths with the services offered and, in turn, the outcomes effected." Unable to establish the specific merit of these programs, the Final Report concludes that home-based services complement, but do not replace, shelter-based services. The writers also concluded that home-based services should target families with younger members at risk in order to avert crises.⁵²

However, other researchers who studied the same Hawaiian program site as the KRA report independently concluded that the Hawaii program was effective in reducing family conflict, deterring runaway behavior, and reducing the number of out-of-home placements.⁵³

Some service organizations have been able to identify service needs of runaways, provide a range of services, and include research and evaluation in their program design. One such study describes the Crosswalk program, which provides food, counseling, referrals to health care facilities and substance abuse programs, recreational facilities, and an innovative alternative school option for runaways, throwaways, and homeless youths in Spokane, Washington.⁵⁴ The program also provides mentors to youths who have been involved with the criminal justice system as well as transitional homes for teen mothers, adolescent males, and young families. At the point of entry to the Crosswalk program, youths complete an Intake Questionnaire which contains descriptive information about the youths and their needs, a Drug and Alcohol Involvement Scale to assess the substance

use or abuse among the youths, and a self-report crime and sexual/physical abuse questionnaire.⁵⁴ At the third year of project operation, staff attempted to contact 55 youths who were involved with the Crosswalk program. Follow-up data on 52 youths served by this program during its first year of operation showed that 23 were employed, 19 were attending school, and 20 were living in more traditional residential placements. Many program graduates had earned high school diplomas or high school equivalency degrees.⁵⁴ The investigators report a decrease in criminal behavior after the first six months in the Crosswalk program as well as a significant decrease in substance abuse. The study did not include a comparison group and follow-up information on 39 youths was provided by project staff rather than the youths themselves or their families.⁵⁴

Additional information about the success or the improvements needed in existing programs for runaways is pending. As part of this increased effort to gather and examine data, the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) has set up procedures and informational clearing houses that draw information from, and act as a resource for, local and state public and private agencies that draw funding for the Runaway and Homeless Youth act program umbrella.¹⁸ For example, FYSB runs the Regional Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) Provider system. This provider system consists of 10 regionally-based organizations that assist local agencies through conferences, workshops, and on-site consultation. The National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth (NCFY) serves as an information center, tracks and documents program activities, produces technical assistance materials, and distributes information. FYSB also gathers

information on the number of youths served, demographic and geographic data, and service delivery patterns through federally-funded Basic Centers, Transitional Living Projects and Drug Abuse Prevention Program projects. In addition, FYSB maintains 2 national databases: the first on literature related to runaway and homeless youths and a second on research and development projects.¹⁸

Research in Progress

In 1995, FYSB allocated approximately \$1.24 million to explore new strategies and policies to serve troubled youths and their families through 11 Research and Demonstration programs. This consisted of 3 collaborative projects for serving youths with developmental disabilities and 8 rural demonstration grants. These collaborative efforts between FYSB and the Administration on Developmental Disabilities explored ways to address the needs of developmentally disabled runaway and homeless youths in Boston, MA, Cincinnati, Ohio, and Omaha, Nebraska. The Boston collaboration between Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Inc. and the Institute for Community Inclusion measured the capacity of local programs to serve disabled runaways or those at risk of running, determined the demand for services for this subgroup, identified barriers to providing these services, and collected data on the applications of these programs. An assessment of program strategies and the impact of training and technical assistance will be conducted during the course of the project.¹⁸

In Ohio, Lighthouse Youth Services, Inc. and the University Affiliated Cincinnati Center for Developmental Disorders Partnership for Youth with Developmental Disabilities joined forces to identify and assist runaways and those at risk of running with developmental disabilities served through the Lighthouse emergency shelter and independent living program. According to FYSB, an independent evaluation of the project is currently underway.¹⁸

In Omaha, Youth Emergency Services and the Meyer Rehabilitation Institute, Nebraska University Affiliated Program collaborated to develop individualized service plans for youths with physical, emotional, and developmental disabilities seeking shelter assistance. FYSB reports that community agency representatives will monitor this project. In addition, FYSB is evaluating 8 continuing Rural Demonstration projects designed to provide a continuum of care to runaway and homeless youths in rural areas across the country. These are: Fort Worth, Texas; New York; Onamia, Minnesota; Bismark, North Dakota; Bellingham, Washington; Tucson, Arizona; Montpelier, Vermont; and Ames, Iowa.¹⁸

BARRIERS TO SERVICES

Rohr and James reported that the nation has over 900 runaway programs. Their survey of more than one-third of these programs reported that 146,000 runaways used these facilities annually.⁵⁵ However, despite this extensive network of runaway and youth

services, these investigators suggest that some runaways are unaware of existing programs or cannot get to them. Others are untrusting of adults or the authorities, fearing that they will either be arrested or returned to their homes, and so do not try to make use of services and programs. According to these authors, runaways usually do not seek information prior to running; typically, runaways find out about resources while on the street, if at all. These youths are not easily reached, are usually transient, and may be unable to read information about how or where to get help.

Social service programs may not be flexible enough to respond to the unique circumstances and complex needs of some runaways.⁴⁷ Youths with disabilities typically face more obstacles to accessing resources because programs may be ill-prepared to meet the needs of this special population and these persons may require extra help to make use of available resources. Through a project funded by FYSB and the Administration on Developmental Disabilities, the Institute for Community Inclusion in collaboration with Bridge Over Troubled Waters, an agency described earlier, conducted a nationwide survey of 242 FYSB-funded agencies. The survey addressed issues regarding youths who had identified emotional, learning, or physical disabilities, or youths with some degree of mental retardation or sensory impairment.⁵⁶

The nationwide survey found that 94% of agencies reported having served youths with identified disabilities.⁵⁶ Of the 242 agencies, 89% reported working with young people with emotional disorders, 88% of agencies reported dealing with learning disabilities, 43% with physical disabilities, 36% with young people with some degree of

mental retardation, and 22% of agencies worked with young people with sensory impairments. Approximately 25% of youths served had identified disabilities.⁵⁶

To meet the needs of these disabled runaways, agencies increased their use of mental health and mental retardation agencies, increased staff training, and reduced the size and duration of counseling sessions, and divided tasks into smaller, more manageable steps for disabled young people. Despite these changes, respondents in this survey voiced concerns that program staff lacked the skills and time to work effectively with disabled youths. Respondents cited insufficient funding for adequate staffing and support services, overcrowding, and physical plant limitations as barriers to providing quality services for the disabled.⁵⁶

Another barrier to runaways' access to services is limited interaction between governmental and voluntary agencies. Coates reported that voluntary agencies typically make referrals to other voluntary agencies, rather than to governmental departments.⁵ Furthermore, most agencies cannot compel youths to accept their services or recommendations despite the youth's need for this assistance.

DISCUSSION

How a society responds to its most troubled youths reflects both the hopes of that society and its priorities. Much is already being done to assist those who have run and to improve the lives of youths who are contemplating running. Across the country, thousands of shelters, transitional living programs and social service agency programs

offering services to runaways that range from medical assistance and housing to family counseling and job skills training have emerged under a broad coalition of public and private funding. In rural areas as well as in cities, runaway youths have assistance options that were not in place just a few years ago. Programs developed by federal, state, and local agencies have enhanced our understanding of runaways, enabling professionals working with these youths to focus on prevention, intervention, and long-term assistance. Social service options represent a shift from punishing runaways for their behavior to assisting them in their needs. The landmark Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) of 1974 has had the greatest impact on reducing the role of the courts in dealing with the problem of runaways. Through its core mandate—the deinstitutionalization of status offenders (DSO)—the JJDP shifted attention and resources from confinement of runaways in state schools and jails to the prevention of running and helping runaways to find safe shelter, meet basic needs, and become productive and self-reliant.

Prevention programs address risk factors associated with running, such as severe family stress, and offer youths alternatives to running. For example, school-based programs alert teachers and school counselors to the warning signs of running, such as poor academic performance, substance abuse, reports of severe family conflict, and physical and sexual abuse. The Dropout Demonstration project, which is actually a collection of 89 projects funded by the United States Department of Education, reduced the rates of absenteeism and dropping-out among elementary and high-school students

through counseling, tutoring, work incentives, and the coordination of services. The Youth Opportunities Unlimited and Youth Fair Chance projects, designed to improve opportunities for youths in impoverished or high-risk neighborhoods, encouraged links among education, employment, social services, the courts, and other community-based agencies. The project claims success in reducing dropout rates among high school youths and in reducing the incidence of juvenile arrests in this population.⁵⁰

Early intervention for runaways provides the best chance of reuniting families, finding alternative placements, and stopping multiple running episodes. Youths who were away from home for shorter periods and those who were older at the time of their first running episode were more likely to be diverted from the streets. Breaking a cycle of repeated running is crucial as some researchers have identified qualitative differences between one-time runners and those with multiple running episodes. Chronic runaways tend to have more complicated histories of physical and sexual abuse, substance abuse, are more likely to have been placed in foster care, have higher school dropout rates, and have more involvement with police and courts. Chronic runaways generally are the most difficult to reach and the most costly to help.

Shelters have unique opportunities to reach youths in crisis as they attempt to reunite runaways with their families or identify alternatives to returning home. Social service agencies have reported changing demographic patterns of runaways. For example, Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Inc., found that in recent years, runaways tend to come from more chaotic homes, have more educational problems, and are younger.

Greater proportions of runaways are from minority groups. These changes have required increased innovation of educational, counseling, vocational services, family services, and transitional living options.

Coordination of these efforts is important given the range of services needed by runaways as well as the range of services offered by individual agencies. A strong referral network is essential to knowing which services are available and how a runaway can qualify for assistance. To better focus the available services, the federal government has established three information clearinghouses and is gathering data on runaways through federally-funded shelter and other service programs.

The long-term effects of social service programs on the lives of runaways has not been clearly established. The few studies that we located were inconclusive in that they lacked adequate comparison groups, had large number of runaways who did not participate in follow-up, or were not systematically studied using standardized techniques. More rigorous studies reportedly are in progress at both the federal level through FYSB and local levels through individual service organizations.

The scarcity of adequate outcome studies has been discouraging. However, this may change somewhat as FYSB now requires that programs provide data about the youths served and the specific services offered. Until recently, data collection by individual agencies was voluntary and only a few submitted complete information to FYSB. Data collection is now mandatory and standardized forms are provided by FYSB along with technical assistance and uniform training.¹⁸

According to the 1996, Report to the Congress on the Youth Programs of the Family and Youth Services Bureau for Fiscal year 1995, FYSB completed or continued major research studies on runaway and homeless youth issues and programs. These include: 1) the Incidence and Prevalence of Drug Abuse Among Runaway and Homeless youth study; 2) Evaluation of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs – A Follow-up Study designed to determine the effects of Basic Center services; 3) evaluation of Transitional Living Programs; and 4) National Evaluation of Home-Based Services programs as alternatives to shelters for runaway and homeless youths. A discussion of the findings of the first study appears earlier in this report. Results of the study of the impact of runaway and homeless youth programs, although expected to be released in March, 1997, was not available as of this writing. Reports from the final 2 studies were under review by the ACYF evaluation unit and, therefore, also not available as of this writing.

Outcome studies should include youths participating in runaway prevention programs as well as those moving through the juvenile justice system. OJJDP does provide detailed descriptive information regarding case dispositions. However, the juvenile courts do not have a mechanism for evaluating the success of their disposition of runaways after they leave the court system. We found no published studies of the outcomes of various court dispositions, such as out-of-home placement, probation, counseling and referral to social services, or case dismissal for these youths. In addition, the question of juvenile detainment remains controversial and the outcome of this practice

needs to be evaluated. According to juvenile court data, runaways are detained more frequently than are any other group of status offender, yet they are the least likely to be formally ruled on by the court.

Public concern with the problems of runaways, before youths leave home, while they are on the streets, and afterward, has fostered many well-targeted social services and court-administration programs to aid these youths and their families. In addition to services for youths who leave home for the streets, an emphasis on prevention and long-term follow-up services has developed. Organized, cooperative efforts between communities and local, state, and federal agencies have broadened the network of services available and have fostered inclusion of disabled and other at-risk youths. Additional research with long-term follow-up is essential in matching the needs of subgroups of the runaway population to specific programs. Outcome research can also help to identify the benefits and deficiencies of existing services and highlight the gaps in those services. This research can also guide policy decisions regarding funding of programs with identified benefits, as well as develop and evaluate innovations.

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